



United States Department of Agriculture

South Branch Kinzua Creek Project Supplemental Environmental Assessment Scoping Document



Forest Service

**Allegheny
National Forest**

**McKean County,
Pennsylvania**

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Who is proposing the projects?

The Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Allegheny National Forest (Forest), is initiating a supplemental environmental analysis for the South Branch Kinzua Creek project pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

What are we proposing to do?

The South Branch Kinzua Creek decision was signed in 2008. In the South Branch Kinzua Creek decision, delayed shelterwood seeds cuts (“shelterwood starts”) and associated reforestation activities (herbicide, site preparation, and fencing) were proposed for the following stands: 810043, 811019, 812010, 812037, 812066, 812067, 812068, 813014, 813022, 813023, and 813027, which total about 189 acres. With the supplemental environmental assessment for South Branch Kinzua Creek project, the Forest Service is proposing to add shelterwood removal cuts and associated reforestation treatments (fertilization, installing tree shelters, planting, and release) to these 11 stands. The proposed shelterwood removal cuts and associated reforestation treatments being proposed for these stands at this time would ensure timely removal of their overstories when adequate regeneration has been established. These additional proposed shelterwood removal cuts would create an additional 189 acres of early structural habitat within the South Branch Kinzua Creek project area.

Where are the projects located?

The South Branch Kinzua Creek project area includes 4,748 acres of National Forest System lands and is located in Lots 263, 302, and 303 and Warrants 3093, 3097, 3122, 3123, 3124, 3130, 3131, and 3132 in Wetmore and Hamlin Township, McKean County, Pennsylvania (see attached map). All of the stands proposed for treatment are located within Management Area 3.0 – Even-aged Management.

When would the project be implemented?

The decision on these supplemental proposals is expected by the end of 2020. Following the decision, implementation could begin in 2021 and activities are anticipated to occur over the next 5 to 15 years.

Why here and why now?

Purpose and Need

The proposed actions for the South Branch Kinzua project was designed to help achieve Allegheny National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (or Forest Plan) goals and objectives. The proposed activities are needed to manage vegetation for Forest Plan desired conditions and improve terrestrial habitat that would:

- Maintain a diversity of age classes, including early age classes spatially distributed across the landscape in Management Area 3.0 within the project area. As existing young age classes develop and mature into older age classes, there is a need to maintain a young age class component into future decades.
- Maintain or enhance seedling, shrub, and herbaceous diversity in the project area where a legacy of deer browsing has resulted in reduced understory diversity.

- Provide a wide variety of habitat conditions across the landscape to meet the needs of game and non-game wildlife species and maintain or enhance species diversity and abundance within the project area.

Specific to Forest Plan Management Area 3.0 direction, these proposed activities would contribute to Forest Plan desired conditions by providing a mix of vegetative conditions and quality timber products that would contribute to the local and regional economy. Regeneration harvests, along with reforestation treatments would allow for the establishment of an early structural forest, which is characteristic of this management area and helps achieve the desired condition of a diversity of healthy vegetation patterns across the landscape (USDA-FS 2007, pages 113-116).

How are we proposing to take action?

Proposed Action

The Forest Service is proposing to add shelterwood removal cuts and associated reforestation treatments to 11 stands within the South Branch Kinzua Creek project area. The proposed shelterwood removal cuts and associated reforestation treatments being proposed for these stands at this time would ensure timely removal of their overstories when adequate regeneration has been established. These additional proposed shelterwood removal cuts would create an additional 189 acres of early structural habitat within the South Branch Kinzua Creek project area.

Proposed Treatments

A silvicultural system is a planned series of treatments by which we establish, grow, manage, and regenerate a forest stand for a specific purpose. This process includes all practices necessary for replacement and development of the forest stand.

Even-aged silvicultural systems are being proposed in this project to meet the overall objectives and the desired future condition of the management area. Under an even-aged silvicultural system, stands are managed with harvest methods and associated reforestation treatments that regenerate trees of a single age class at the time of regeneration harvest. In all cases, areas managed using even-aged systems retain trees that provide ecological function and structure inherited from past ecosystems and are important in recovery of the biological community. All of the stands that are being proposed for an even-aged treatments have understory vegetation that interferes with the establishment of new seedlings; therefore, reforestation treatments are often required to provide adequate conditions for seedlings to germinate and grow.

The Allegheny National Forest is divided into geographic subdivisions known as compartments and then further divided into smaller units known as stands. The silvicultural methods and reforestation activities proposed for this project are summarized in the table below. Successful regeneration of the forested stands identified in this project typically involves a combination of the proposed treatments implemented over a 5 to 15 year time period.

The following silvicultural treatments and associated reforestation activities are proposed:

- ***Shelterwood sequence*** is a multiple-step regeneration harvest in which approximately one-third of the overstory is removed in the initial (shelterwood) seed cut to provide sunlight on the ground to encourage tree seedling development. After adequate tree seedlings develop, the shelterwood removal cut follows, in which nearly all of the overstory trees are removed, allowing full sunlight to reach the established seedlings.

- **Fertilization** is used to accelerate the growth of natural seedling regeneration. Fertilization generally involves the aerial or ground application of nutrients on existing seedlings, usually during the month of May or June.
- **Tree planting** is prescribed in areas where planned natural regeneration has failed, or where it is desirable to supplement natural tree seedling establishment in order to improve species diversity.
- Where deer browsing impacts are high, **tree shelters** may be installed on planted seedlings and maintained to exclude deer and reduce browsing on desired seedlings. This allows for desirable tree seedlings to develop and grow to a competitive size and beyond the risk for deer browsing. Tree shelters are removed when objectives have been met.
- **Release** involves the non-commercial, manual cutting of tall-growing woody vegetation that interferes with the growth and survival of desired tree seedlings, saplings, or shrubs in young stands (age class 20 years or less). Release promotes tree species diversity.

About 280 acres of regeneration harvests were proposed (about 9 percent) within Management Area 3.0 on the National Forest System lands in the South Branch Kinzua Creek Heights project area for the original analysis and decision. Adding these additional 189 acres of regeneration harvests (shelterwood removal harvests; about 6 percent) in the project area, which would result in 469 acres of regeneration harvests (or 15 percent) within Management Area 3.0 on National Forest System lands in the project area.

Summary of proposed activities for South Branch Kinzua Creek project

Even-aged Vegetation Management (acres)	Original	Revised
Commercial thinning	556	556
Salvage thinning	8	8
Shelterwood seed cut	488	488
Shelterwood removal cut	9	9
Overstory Removals (Removal Cut with Reserves)	280	469
Understory Vegetation Treatments (acres)	Original	Revised
Herbicide–Reforestation	834	834
Site Preparation	750	750
Fertilization	96	285
Fencing	686	686
Install Tree Shelters	73	92
Tree Planting for Species Diversity	191	210
Release for Species Diversity	610	799

Acronyms and abbreviations used in proposed silvicultural treatments table below

Silvicultural Treatments (1st Entry, 2nd Entry, 3rd Entry Timber Harvests)

SWS	Shelterwood Seed Cut
SWR	Shelterwood Removal

Note: The six-digit stand number listed in this table consists of the compartment number (first three digits) and the stand number (last three digits). For example, stand 636001 is stand 1 in compartment 636.

Proposed silvicultural treatments for South Branch Kinzua Creek Supplement Environmental Assessment

Stand	MA	Acres	1st Entry	2nd Entry	3rd Entry	Fertilize	Install Tree Shelters	Plant	Release
810043	3.0	7	-	SWS	SWR	7	1	1	7
811019	3.0	34	-	SWS	SWR	34	3	3	34
812010	3.0	22	-	SWS	SWR	22	2	2	22
812037	3.0	30	-	SWS	SWR	30	3	3	30
812066	3.0	12	-	SWS	SWR	12	1	1	12
812067	3.0	9	-	SWS	SWR	9	1	1	9
812068	3.0	16	-	SWS	SWR	16	2	2	16
813014	3.0	16	-	SWS	SWR	16	2	2	16
813022	3.0	21	-	SWS	SWR	21	2	2	21
813023	3.0	12	-	SWS	SWR	12	1	1	12
813027	3.0	10	-	SWS	SWR	10	1	1	10

Note: The six-digit stand number listed in this table consists of the compartment number (first three digits) and the stand number (last three digits). For example, stand 636001 is stand 1 in compartment 636.

How does supplementing these projects implement the Forest Plan?

Management Direction

The Forest Plan provides a programmatic framework regarding allocation of National Forest System lands and the measures necessary to protect resources. It describes how the Allegheny National Forest should be managed and what resources should be provided by these lands now and into the future. The Forest Plan provides a vision (USDA-FS 2007, pages 7–16) that includes sustaining or improving forest ecosystem health, enhancing the resiliency of the Allegheny National Forest ecosystems, and providing a diversity of vegetation patterns across the landscape.

Proposed activities are consistent with management direction in the Forest Plan. Specifically, the proposed action addresses the following Forest Plan goals and objectives (USDA-FS 2007, pages 12–21):

- Develop and enhance the seedling, shrub, and herbaceous diversity to improve structural conditions (USDA-FS 2007, pages 14, 19, A-1, A-2, and A-14). Provide a diversity of vegetation patterns across the landscape that represents well distributed habitats, a range of forest age classes and vegetative stages, a variety of healthy functioning vegetation layers, moderate to well-stocked forest cover, and the variety of vegetation species or forest types necessary to achieve multiple resource objectives and sustain ecosystem health (USDA-FS 2007, page 14).
- Continue to implement and monitor a range of silvicultural and reforestation practices in order to be responsive to emerging issues and regenerate stands to a diversity of tree seedlings of good quality, form, and health (USDA-FS 2007, page 14).
- Improve the overall health and sustainability of Allegheny National Forest ecosystems by reducing understory dominance of native invasive species such as beech brush, ferns, grass and striped maple, and non-native invasive species on 3,000 to 6,200 acres annually. Do this through direct treatments: site preparation, herbicide application, scarification, mechanical treatment, or fencing to encourage

greater species diversity with a wider variety of herbaceous and woody plants or tree seedlings (USDA-FS 2007, page 21).

- Provide a safe, efficient and economical transportation system that is responsive to public and administrative needs, while having minimal adverse effects on the natural forest ecosystem (USDA-FS 2007, page 16).
- Provide a sustainable flow of commercial timber products that will contribute to the local and regional economy, contribute to the annual forest-wide allowable sale quantity, and maintain 10 to 12 percent of MA 3.0 in early structural habitat (0 to 20 years old) over time (USDA-FS 2007, pages 8, 14, and 113).

Proposed activities will follow Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Management Area Direction

Lands managed by the Allegheny National Forest are assigned a management area designation. This designation identified the suitable uses, desired conditions, and standards and guidelines for forest management. The project includes the following management areas:

Management Area 3.0 –Even-aged Management emphasizes even-aged management to provide a forest that is a mix of predominantly shade intolerant and mid-tolerant hardwood stands of various ages and associated understories and habitat for a diversity of plant and animal species. Management Area direction can be found on pages 113-115 of the Forest Plan.

The acres within each management area (MA) in each project can be found in the original environmental assessments for each project on the Allegheny National Forest website at:

For original South Branch Kinzua Creek project: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=17077>.

For supplemental South Branch Kinzua Creek project: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57331>.